

White Plains

A city in Westchester County, N.Y. It is the seat of government for that county. During the Revolutionary War after the Battle of Long Island on 27 August 1776, George Washington was forced to evacuate Long Island and later, the entire state of New York. During the retreat through New York and New Jersey, contingents of American soldiers fought a series of sharp rearguard actions which held up the British forces under General Howe and allowed the Continental Army to escape intact to Pennsylvania. The second of those actions was fought near White Plains, N.Y., on 28 October 1776. Though the American troops were ultimately driven from the field, they held the British back long enough for General Washington's main force to continue its retreat successfully. White Plains (CVE-66) was named for the Revolutionary War battle fought near the city, at the time only a village.

(CVE-66: dp. 10,400 (f.); l. 512'3"; b. 65'2"; ew. 108'1"; dr. 22'6"; s. 19.3 k. (tl.); cpl. 860; a. 1 5", 12 40mm., 20 20mm., 24 ac.;

cl. Casablanca)

White Plains (CVE-66) was laid down on 11 February 1943 at Vancouver, Wash., by the Kaiser Shipbuilding Co., Inc., under a Maritime Commission contract (MC hull 1103) as Elbour Bay (ACV-66); renamed White Plains on 3 April 1943; redesignated CVE-66 on 15 July 1943; launched on 27 September 1943; sponsored by Mrs. Marc A. Mitscher; delivered to the Navy on 15 November 1943 at Astoria, Oreg.; and commissioned that same day, Capt. Oscar A. Weller in command.

The escort aircraft carrier completed outfitting at Astoria, Oreg., on 4 December 1943 and reported for shakedown training on the 8th. At the conclusion of her shakedown training, the warship entered San Diego on 21 December. On the 30th, she returned to sea, bound via Pearl Harbor to Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. She arrived at her destination on 11 January 1944 and unloaded the aircraft she had transported. On the 17th, the ship headed back to Oahu, arriving in Pearl Harbor six days later. Following a four-day turnaround period, White Plains set course for the Central Pacific again to provide aircraft logistics support for the Marshall Islands operation. By the time she reached Tarawa on 3 February, Majuro Atoll had been taken unopposed and Kwajalein's Japanese garrison had been all but subdued. The next day she got underway for Majuro where she arrived on the 5th. From there, the escort carrier moved on to Kwajalein for a brief visit before heading back to Hawaii. White Plains stopped briefly at Oahu late in February before continuing on to the west coast on 23 February. She arrived in Alameda, Calif., on 3 March.

While on the west coast, White Plains conducted operational training for her own ship's company and carrier qualifications for three air squadrons. In April, she embarked her own permanently-assigned air unit, Composite Squadron (VC)4, composed of 16 "Wildcat" fighters and 12 "Avenger" torpedo bombers. On 24 April, she departed the west coast at San Diego and, on 1 May arrived in Pearl Harbor. During the next month, she conducted air operations and amphibious support training out of Pearl Harbor. At the end of May, she stood out of port in company with units of the Marianas invasion force. White Plains' portion of the fleet staged out of Eniwetok Atoll and, during the voyage from there to the Marianas, her aircraft provided antisubmarine and combat air patrol. During the Saipan invasion itself, her planes continued to cover the fleet against submarine and air attack as well as strafing the beaches, spotting for gunfire support ships. They helped repulse at least three major enemy air attacks. During those raids her antiaircraft gunners also joined in and, on 17 June, earned their first definite kill. Later VC-4 "Avengers" successfully torpedoed an enemy transport during a sweep of the island of Rota. White Plains cleared the Marianas on 2 July and, after a week at Eniwetok, returned to the Marianas with her air squadron upgraded to a total of 28 aircraft. During her second tour of duty in the Marianas, the escort carrier supported the Tinian assault late in July. Her planes provided sortie after sortie in support of the troops ashore and over the ships assembled, but White Plains herself suffered no enemy attacks though the heavy flight schedule proved grueling to air squadron and ship's company alike. (JP) She completed her participation during the first week in August and departed

(the Marianas on her way to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. She arrived in Segond Channel on 16 August and changed operational control from the 5th Fleet to the 3d Fleet. At Espiritu Santo, she began preparations for the invasion of the Palau Islands. Those preparations included amphibious support training in the Solomon Islands. White Plains and 10 of her sister escort carriers moved into the vicinity of the Palaus during the second week of September. Their planes provided a portion of the prelanding bombardment and support for the troops after the 15 September assault. In contrast to the Marianas campaign⁹ and later operations, the Palaus, though extremely difficult on the troops ashore, brought little opposition to the ships in the waters surrounding the islands. No enemy air attacks developed because the Japanese were husbanding their aircraft for the defense of the Philippines, and few shore batteries were sited near enough to the coast to fire upon ships as a result of ~~the~~ Japanese¹ new strategic concept of defense in depth at some distance from the beaches. On 21 September, she joined the forces detached from the Palau operation for the occupation of Ulithi Atoll. That mission proved to be a walk over; the enemy had no defensive forces there.

After repairs at Manus in the Admiralty Islands, White Plains headed for the invasion of the Philippines at Leyte in October. The initial assault went forward on the 20th. Aircraft from White Plains provided air support for the troops and ASW and combat air patrols for the ships assembled in Leyte Gulf. The Japanese, however, chose to oppose the landings with their surface fleet because of the strategic importance of the Philippines which lay athwart their lines of communication with the East Indies. They launched their surface counterattack in three distinct phases. While a decoy force of planeless carriers moved south from Japan under Admiral Ozawa in an attempt to draw off Halsey's 3d Fleet and the large carriers, the forces under Vice Admirals Nishimura and Shima attempted to force the Surigao Strait from the south, and Vice Admiral Kurita's Center Force tried to sneak through the Central Philippines and ^{transit} ~~through~~ the hopefully unguarded San Bernardino Strait. The Center Force, by far the strongest of the enemy units involved, consisted of five battleships--including Yamato and Musashi--11 heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and 19 destroyers. By the time Kurita's Center Force cleared the San Bernardino Strait on 25 October, it had been reduced by four heavy cruisers and one battleship, Musashi. Three cruisers were lost to submarine attacks in Palawan Passage on the 23d, and Musashi and heavy cruiser Myoko fell victim to TF 38's air attacks in the Sibuyan Sea on the 24th. The battlewagon sank while Myoko headed back to Brunei Bay, heavily damaged. In addition, Vice Admiral Oldendorf's old battleships in Leyte Gulf obliterated Nishimura's unit and sent Shima's packing on the night of 24 and 25 October.

In the meantime, Ozawa's decoy carriers finally succeeded in drawing Halsey off to the north when the American admiral received information indicating that a battered Center Force had begun retirement. Kurita's retrograde movement, however, proved to be temporary, and he soon reversed course once again and headed for the San Bernardino Strait. With Oldendorf regrouping in Leyte Gulf and Halsey off chasing an almost illusory carrier task force, only three task groups--composed of escort carriers, destroyers and destroyer escorts--remained off Samar between Kurita and Leyte Gulf. White Plains was an element of "Taffy 3," the northernmost of the three units and the one which bore the brunt of Kurita's surface onslaught. Rear Admiral Clifton A. F. Sprague's "Taffy 3" first learned of Kurita's presence when, at 0637, a pilot on routine patrol spotted the force and attacked with depth charges. Rear Admiral Sprague was incredulous and demanded identification verification which came disconcertingly enough when the enemy battleships' pagoda masts--unmistakable indicators--loomed over the horizon.

For the next two and one-half hours, the Japanese force chased "Taffy 3" southward and subjected the escort carriers and their counterattacking screen to a murderous, but mercifully and frequently inaccurate, heavy-caliber cannonade. The carriers' aircraft fought back fearlessly, making dummy runs on the Japanese ships to slow their speed of advance after expending all their bombs, torpedoes, and ammunition. During their ^{own} suicidal counterattacks, three of the escorts, Johnston (DD-557), Hoel (DD-533), and Samuel B. Roberts (DE-413) were sunk by heavy caliber gunfire. Later, Gambier Bay (CVE-73) succumbed to the same fate while Fanshaw Bay (CVE-70), Kalinin Bay (CVE-68), Dennis (DE-405), and Heermann (DD-532) suffered heavy damage from the same source. Throughout the surface phase of the action, White Plains' leading position in the disposition protected her from any gunfire damage; however, the unit still had an aerial ordeal to endure.

Miraculously, the Japanese surface force broke off its pursuit between 0912 and 0917, and, after milling around in apparent confusion for a time, retired northward for San Bernardino Strait. The retreat by Kurita's surface force, however, did not end the ordeal for White Plains and her colleagues. After about 90 minutes respite they suffered harassment from a different quarter. At 1050 a formation of six enemy fighters appeared and began simultaneous kamikaze attacks. Two of them singled out White Plains as their victim. Her antiaircraft gunners responded with a hail of gunfire. They scored a hit on one of the intruders, and he immediately changed course and succeeded in fatally crashing St. Lo. His comrade continued on toward White Plains, but her antiaircraft guns finally brought him down mere yards astern. His explosion scattered debris all over her deck and sides but caused only 11 relatively minor casualties. In the meantime, Kitkun Bay and Kalinin Bay also suffered kamikaze crashes, but neither proved fatal. That attack proved to be her final combat action, not only of the Battle off Samar but also of the war. She steamed to Manus with the other surviving carriers, arriving there on 31 October. After an inspection of the damage, it was decided that she should return to the United States for complete repairs. Accordingly, the escort carrier departed Manus on 6 November and headed--via Pearl Harbor--to the west coast. She arrived in San Diego on 27 November and immediately began repairs.

Repairs complete, White Plains stood out of San Diego on 19 January 1945. However, for the remainder of the war, she carried out the relatively tame assignment of ferrying replacement aircraft from the United States to bases in the western Pacific. During the last months of the war, she visited such places as Kwajalain, Hollandia, Ulithi, Saipan, Guam, Leyte, and Pearl Harbor. All had been scenes of major combat actions, but, by that time, all had become rear areas. ^{Her} ^{approval} ~~The~~ closest ~~she came~~ to the fighting after Leyte Gulf came just after the Okinawa landings in April when she steamed to within 100 miles of the island to launch two squadrons of Marine Corps F4U "Corsairs" for duty there.

The end of hostilities in mid-August found her en route from Pearl Harbor to San Pedro, Calif. She arrived at her destination on the 22d but soon moved to San Diego. From there she headed back to the western Pacific on 6 September to begin "Magic Carpet" duty bringing American fighting men home from the Orient. Twenty days later, she arrived in Buckner Bay, Okinawa, where she embarked more than 800 passengers for the voyage to the United States. On 28 September, she pointed her bow eastward and set a course, via Pearl Harbor, to San Diego. The escort carrier entered San Diego on 16 October and disembarked her passengers. After nine days in port, she got underway for Pearl Harbor, stopping only briefly on 1 November before setting out on the return voyage to the west coast. The warship visited San Francisco for five days from 7 to 12 November and then set out across the Pacific once more. She entered port at Guam in the Marianas on 27 November, embarked passengers,

and then began the return voyage on 30 November. White Plains completed her last voyage across the Pacific when she arrived in Seattle, Wash., on 14 December. She remained there until 30 January at which time, she embarked upon the voyage, via the Panama Canal and Norfolk, Va., to Boston, Mass. The carrier entered Boston on 17 February 1946 and began preparations for decommissioning. White Plains was decommissioned on 10 July 1946 and was berthed with the Boston Group, Atlantic Reserve Fleet. She remained with the reserve fleet for 12 years. On 12 June 1955, she was redesignated a utility aircraft carrier (CVU-66). Finally, her name was struck from the Navy list on 1 July 1958. She was sold on 29 July to the Hyman Michaels Co., of Chicago, Ill., for scrapping.

White Plains (CVE-66) earned five battle stars during World War II as well as the Presidential Unit Citation for her part in the Battle off Samar.